# *New York*
# Theatre Critics' Reviews
## *1944*

Volume V, Number 1 • *Yearly Subscription $15.00* • Week of January 10, 1944

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*Asterisks indicate shows scheduled to play week of January 10, 1944.

### SOMETHING HAS BEEN ADDED

The publishers of New York Theatre Critics' Reviews are pleased to start the new theatre year with a letter from Burns Mantle, drama critic emeritus of the New York Daily News, which will be found on the back page of this issue.

Mr. Mantle gave up playgoing officially at the beginning of the 1943-44 season to escape, as he said, the grind of newspaper deadlines and the obligations of a daily theatre column. He is continuing as editor of "*The Best Plays*," the annual year book of the drama, which he began the season of 1919-20. This series of theatre records he has, working with Garrison P. Sherwood as a collaborator, now carried back to the season of 1899-1900, thus completing a detailed history of American theatre play productions from the turn of the 20th Century to the present day.

Knowing that Mr. Mantle is still taking a lively interest in the Broadway scene, and is as enthusiastic a playgoer as ever, the publishers of Theatre Critics' Reviews wrote asking him for an expression of opinion on the first half of the current theatre season. "A Letter from an Old Subscriber" is his reply. It is the publishers' hope that they can induce Mr. Mantle to continue this added feature through the season.

*Theatre Critics' Reviews brings you each week the complete reviews as they originally appeared in these New York newspapers*

NEW YORK SUN
NEW YORK POST
NEW YORK TIMES
NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM
NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE
NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN

*Published by* Critics' Theatre Reviews : : : 235 East 22nd Street, New York 10, N. Y.

# "Ramshackle Inn"

Melodramatic farce by George Batson, staging by Arthur Sircom and settings by Frederick Fox; presented by Robert Reud at the Royale Theatre, January 5, 1944.

**NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM**
***January 6, 1944***

## *ZaSu Pits Her Skill in Vain*

**By LOUIS KRONENBERGER**

ZASU PITTS is an amusing character actress, but she is no match for *Ramshackle Inn*. For her Broadway debut she has chosen a farce-melodrama that encourages her to exhibit her talent without exhibiting any talent of its own. It is anything but clear to me why so many playwrights are hypnotized by this branch of playwrighting, since despite an occasional *Arsenic and Old Lace*, farce and melodrama are very ill-suited parties to a marriage. Possibly playwrights think that just by combining the two they are exempted from making the farce funny or the melodrama exciting.

In any case, *Ramshackle Inn* is a dreary piece of hocus-pocus with a soporific first act and a helter-skelter second and third. It is laid in one of those dingily rococo inns that seem to have the concession for this style of play, and its villains are members of a liquor ring who water Four Roses and other packaged goods in the basement. Miss Pitts is catapulted into the plot as an old maid librarian who has been inspired to buy the crumbling inn, sight unseen, through the fascinations of *Grand Hotel*. Bumbling about in the usual Pitts millinery, she winds up by outfoxing the villains and collecting a large reward. Betweenwhiles, an awful lot of people are bumped off and hidden in closets and trunks.

The melodrama of *Ramshackle Inn* is even more mechanical than it is extensive. Mr. Batson doesn't bother to keep you in the dark concerning who the evildoers are, or to shroud their deeds in anything creepy or scary. They merely kill for exercise. Nor, despite Miss Pitts' valiant and ingratiating efforts, has he done much better with the farce. Miss Pitts is in there punching, and by triumphing over her material manages to scare up some laughs; but there are fewer laughs in *Ramshackle Inn*, I'm afraid, than there are corpses. The trouble is that the writing is as amateurish as the sleuthing.

A large cast, including Ruth Holden, Joe Downing, Harlan Briggs, Ruth Gates, Mary Barthelmess and others, act out in uninspired fashion this decidedly uninspired play.

**NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN**
***January 6, 1944***

## *Ex-Movie Star Gets Big Ovation in Legitimate Role at Royale*

**By ROBERT GARLAND**

LAST night, as I left the Royale Theatre, ZaSu Pitts was receiving an ovation. A genuine ovation, mind you; no picayunish imitation of the real thing. Having concluded her Broadway debut as an honest-to-goodness off-screen actress, Miss Pitts was taking one curtain call after another. There was no doubt about it. The folks out front were genuinely glad to see her, as the saying is, in person.

Assisted by an uneven cast and what programs refer to as her gaucheries, her bumbling, her rural naivete and her outlandish hats and frocks, Miss Pitts had worked her way through "Ramshackle Inn," a melodramatic farce thrown together by George Batson, and set up on an open stage by the Robert Reud who produces plays by numerology.

**THE CAST**

| | |
|---|---|
| Arbothnot | Mason Curry |
| Joyce Rogers | Ruth Holden |
| Patton | Joe Downing |
| Mame Phillips | Ruth Gates |
| Constable Small | Harlan Briggs |
| Belinda Pryde | ZaSu Pitts |
| Commodore Lucius Towser | Ralph Theadore |
| Gail Russell | Helene Heigh |
| Alice Fisher | Maurine Alexander |
| Dr. Russell | Richard Rober |
| Bill Phillips | William Blees |
| Mr. Temple | Royal Dana Tracy |
| Mary Temple | Mary Barthelmess |
| Gilhooley | Robert Toms |
| Fred Porter | John Lorenz |

As a play, even as a melodramatic-farce, "Ramshackle Inn" is difficult to write about. Basically, it is merely early Mary Roberts Rinehart, which is to say that it is "The Bat" with a touch of "Tish" thrown in. But, admitting that it is, some of the lines are funny and several of the situations are funnier—especially that burlesque scene in which the Belinda Pryde, who is ZaSu Pitts, is supposed to be tied immovably to a chair.

### Everybody's Happy

The playwright, George Batson, has been a consistent theatregoer during the last two or three—or four, for that matter—decades. Blessed with an accumulative and well-stocked memory, he has written "Ramshackle Inn" practically by heart. Starting off with a would-be spookey old hotel and one of the phoniest thunderstorms I have ever heard, he goes on from there. From "The Bat" to Arsenic and Old Lace"!

There are lights that go off and on; doors that open mysteriously; screams in the dark; frail women in the clutches of their enemies; comic village constables; FBI ladies in disguise; cases of whskey in the cellar; three (or is it 30?) thousand dollars hidden in a cigar-box; bootleggers and hijackers; rum-runners in the offing.

Oh, I just can't begin to tell you half the situations that come and go these nights at the Royale Theatre. There's even a cadaver in a trunk which, after having been discovered, most certainly gets around—as Miss Pitts remarks during the passing of the evening. But, in case you're worried, everyone—including ZaSu Pitts—is happy when the piece comes to an end. Everyone, that is, who isn't dead or on his way to prison.

### Up to ZaSu Pitts

Once ZaSu Pitts hits her stride, once she is permitted to kid "Ramshackle Inn," as if it were "The Tavern," the new arrival in 45th Street has its moments. That's why the second act is funnier than the first; the third act is funnier than the second. But there isn't quite enough fun to eke out the evening. And the would-be scarey parts are a sheer waste of time. There's not a good scare in a play-full.

Joe Downing, who is, for my money, the most believably tough guy on the current stage, is believably tough as one Mr. Patton. You'll remember him as "Baby-Face" Martin in Sidney Kingsley's "Dead End." And that not-to-be-forgotten scene he had with Margery Mann, Harlan Briggs is his old familiar self as the Eternal Village Constable.

But it is ZaSu Pitts who is the performer to cling at the Royale. The gaucheries, the bumbling, the rural naivete, the outlandish hats and frocks, as programmed by the press agent, are all there to help her. But, being a natural-born comedienne, she brings to the role of Belinda Pryde an inborn gift for fun-making that has been perfected in the studios of Hollywood . . .

"Ramshackle Inn" is entirely up to ZaSu Pitts. More power to her.

**NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE**
***January 6, 1944***

## *Miss Pitts Comes to Town*

**By HOWARD BARNES**

AFTER all these years of screen acting ZaSu Pitts had a coming-out party on the New York stage last evening. She is the star of "Ramshackle Inn," a so-called melodramatic farce by George Batson. It is a pleasure to report that her clowning is as assured and amusing at the Royale as it ever was on celluloid. Unfortunately she has a role, rather than a play, for her debut. While her angular antics are artful and beautifully timed for laughter, the haunted-house fable in which she appears is a tedious bit of balderdash.

• • •

The author, who is now a corporal in the United States Army Signal Corps, must have figured that the time was ripe for a clutching hand-cadaver thriller. He may have been right. Where his reckoning went astray was in not realizing that even a burlesque murder mystery needs a lot of carpentry. His tale of a spinster librarian, who buys an inn near Gloucester only to find herself hemmed in by black-market liquor gangsters, has moments of moderate suspense. It has several funny situations, nicely tailored to Miss Pitts' comic vagaries and her bewildered double-takes. Strictly as a show, it is as ramshackle as the midst it celebrates.

• • •

That the star moves triumphantly through the skull-duggery and nonsense of the plot is a genuine tribute to her acting skill. Whether she is fluttering frantically about with disappearing corpses, or is impersonating an FBI agent in turning in a new crop of bootleggers, she makes every line and every gesture count. Sometimes she is saddled with such trivial slapstick as running up and down stairs in a maribou dressing gown, but she gets away with it by the sheer delight of her fooling. "Ramshackle Inn" was lucky to have her in it. She, I think, is none too fortunate in her vehicle.

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The chief assistance she has is from props and stage effects. Lights keep going on and off all the time; there is a lot of thunder and lightning and everything from a trunk to a safe for characters to keep popping in and out of. For human support Miss Pitts has some relatively sinister performing on the part of Joe Downing, blustering portrayals by Harlan Briggs and Royal Dana Tracy, who are old hands at this sort of thing, and a pleasantly restrained bit by Mary Barthelmess. Arthur Sircom has staged the piece briskly, but even the presence of Miss Pitts does not make it very entertaining.

**NEW YORK SUN**
***January 6, 1944***

## *ZaSu Pitts (in Person) Arrives in 'Ramshackle Inn,' Which is Very Feeble*

**By WARD MOREHOUSE**

THE antic ZaSu Pitts, of the glassy stare, the fluttery hands, the cockeyed millinery and the grotesque walk, has lately turned from the screen to the stage, and last night she made her first Broadway appearance. Now that she's done it she will probably want to try other plays, but what-

ever her further adventures she will never do worse than "Ramshackle Inn." It's pretty terrible.

Here the old formula is back with us again—banging doors, lights going out, screams in the dark, pistol shots, howling wind, bodies in trunks and closets, and the FBI on the prowl. "Watch that blonde," observed one sapient playgoer between acts. "If she doesn't turn out to be the FBI agent my name is May Yokes." And so she did.

In following the unfolding of George Batson's melodramatic farce, done within the confines of Frederick Fox's chill-and-shudder setting, you get to wondering if any talents comparable to those that devised such pieces as "The Cat and the Canary" and "The Bat" are still left in the New York theater. Mr. Batson's contrivance is something of a hodge-podge of "The Tavern," "Seven Keys to Baldpate" and "The Snark Was a Boojum," using the worst features of each.

ZaSu Pitts, in her first Broadway fling, has the role of a New England spinster, a librarian, who invests her last dime in the purchase of an old inn in the general vicinity of Gloucester, and to the stage she brings all the tricks to which her screen following has so readily responded. I concede that there are playgoers who will be convulsed by her slightest gesture or grimace, and that if she could get a play built around her she might easily be a scream.

There are several experienced Broadway professionals in the cast which Robert Reud has assembled for her, but "Ramshackle Inn" is so inept and so doleful it quite submerges such ordinarily able fellows as Joe Downing and Ralph Theadore. The ingenue of the evening, Mary Barthelmess, daughter of a hero of the films, is pretty and it will be interesting to watch her when somebody gives her a part.

"Ramshackle Inn" belongs to the What's-all-the-shooting-for school of farcical melodrama, but it is all very inexpert and very feeble.

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**NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM**
***January 6, 1944***

## *Ramshackle Inn Is Masterpiece of Corn*

**By BURTON RASCOE**

I am going to do something which I think is (for me) an unusual thing. I am going to recommend, seriously, earnestly, urgently, a "bad" play.

It (this play I recommend) is, like Arsenic and Old Lace, a play so preposterous that it is absolutely fascinating. It is one of the best entertainments currently available on Broadway (and there are a lot of good shows available this season), I believe, indeed, that if you will leave behind (as a bookmark in your favorite volume of Aristotle) your superior critical judgment of what the drama should be like and just sit back and relax at Ramshackle Inn, you will thoroughly enjoy yourself.

It may make you laugh out loud (as it did many ingenuous souls last night) frequently and heartily—as some people do at Arsenic and Old Lace; or it may stir in you only an utterly beguiled quiet, inner sensation of mirth by its ingenious corniness, as Arsenic and Old Lace does me (I have seen that entertaining theatrical freak twice and never laughed out loud once); but, if you have either a high risibility potential or a keen appreciation of superior things, I guarantee you will have a good time at Ramshackle Inn.

### A Theater Natural

Moreover, I believe that Robert Reud, the producer of Ramshackle Inn, has displayed in this instance as prescient and precipient a sense of the theater as did the Messrs. Crouse and Lindsay when they decided to put on Arsenic and Old Lace. That play, as I understand it, was written seriously, as a horrifying murder story—as a dramatic slice of real life. The Messrs. Crouse and Lindsay were keen enough to see that if they chortled over the sheer, ridiculous naivete of the amateurish script, people in great numbers might have the same sense of humor they have and chortle over the thing if it were done on the stage. They produced Arsenic and Old Lace, the rest is history.

Whether George Batson, the author of Ramshackle Inn, considers his play a serious piece of work or not, I don't know; but Mr. Reud knows what it is, for he labels it "a melodramatic farce" and, for probably groundless fears that some obtuse theatregoers will misapprehend it, he has engaged the noted movie comic, ZaSu Pitts, for the stellar role.

### The Real Corn

In every other respect Mr. Reud has assembled a superb cast, from Joe Downing, as the principal heavy, and Richard Rober, as the sinister gunman, to Maurine Alexander, for the sex interest in revealing negligee, and Mary Barthelmess (a real beauty) as the young love ingenue; and they have been directed by Arthur Sircom to extract every drop of corn to make a genuinely exhilarating evening. Not a trick is missed. The second act curtain is wonderful and the denouement unexcelled by any genius since Mac Sennett was in his prime with Keystone Films.

The Batson-Reud masterpiece tells of an old maid librarian who saved her money for 20 years (all of $3000) to buy a hotel so she could meet some interesting people like those in Grand Hotel. She buys an ancient and leaky inn on the seashore near Gloucester and, by George, she meets them—people who make those in Grand Hotel (another unintentional farce which was taken seriously) look like ordinary citizens from Dubuque . . . I must report that quite a few self-conscious first-nighters last night didn't seem to know what to make of it and so took refuge in an attitude of superior disdain.

But I think Mr. Reud has guessed right—that Ramshackle Inn is a play which will hold playgoers entranced in their seats, for different reasons.

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**NEW YORK POST**
***January 6, 1944***

## *ZaSu Pitts on the Broadway Stage in 'Ramshackle Inn'*

**By WILELLA WALDORF**

ZASU PITTS stepped off the screen last night long enough to make her Broadway stage debut at the Royale Theatre in "Ramshackle Inn," described in the program as "a melodramatic farce by George Batson."

At rare intervals, such a combination—melodrama and farce—proves uncommonly diverting, as in "Arsenic and Old Lace."

But generally the term "melodramatic farce" means that the melodrama is not good enough to please even the author, who therefore indicates occasionally that he is just kidding. The result usually is a play that is neither exciting enough to raise hair in the good old sliding-panel style, nor funny enough to qualify as a genuine laugh-provoker.

The best thing abut "Ramshackle Inn" is its setting by Frederick Fox depicting Ye Olde Colonial Inn not far from Gloucester. It is a shivery place in the "Baldpate" and "Tavern" tradition, but frowsier. A librarian from East Ipswich, Vt., has just bought it with her life savings because the advertisement sounded wonderful and she has always wanted to see lots of people coming and going.

### Up to Her Movie Tricks

The librarian, of course, is Miss Pitts, and she sees plenty of people come and go in one eventful night. There are strange doings in the cellar and in most of the rooms on the balcony. So many murders are committed that the bodies pile up alarmingly and Miss Pitts herself inquires at one point: "Doesn't it get monotonous?"

Miss Pitts herself has brought with her to the stage the same addle-pated tricks she has long employed in the movies, and she manages to be funny in her Pittsian fashion when the plot is not too much for her.

She stares like a wounded calf when people are rude. She dresses peculiarly, and at one point becomes involved in a slinky negligee, a rickety staircase and a trunk with a dead body in it. She flutters her hands helplessly, and fumbles frantically with her reticule when some of the swag comes her way.

In the last act she is mistaken for Matilda Janeway, the ace lady-sleuth of the FBI, and one of the thugs remarks "I knew nobody could really be that dumb."

Miss Pitts is an amusing personality, with a repertoire of gestures that are often funny in themselves, but she is not a comedienne in the stricter sense of the term. Once her "act" is exhausted, she can only repeat herself. "Ramshackle Inn" gives her only sporadic opportunities to shine. The play itself is as ramshackle as the inn.

A performance to be recommended only to the theatrically naive, or to the most unflaggingly loyal of Miss Pitts's many fans.

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**NEW YORK TIMES**
***January 6, 1944***

## *Grin and Kill*

**By LEWIS NICHOLS**

IT is to be feared that as a play the accent is on the first word of "Ramshackle Inn," which opened last evening at the Royale. A comedy-melodrama, it succeeds in being not very funny and not very exciting, which are two pretty serious strikes to have against it in the Broadway league. If it does bring Zasu Pitts to town for the first time away from the silver screen, it is only to show that in a better play she might one day be quite wonderful. This definitely is not that play.

"Ramshackle Inn" is a country hotel, purchased by a Vermont librarian—Miss Pitts, of course. Bad and awful things go on, including murder, drugging and some quite impossible dialogue. The setting has ten doors, and bodies are lugged through most of them; the carnage through murder and/or mayhem is enough for half a dozen plays. It is as though George Batson, the author, had hoped to cover up the vagaries of his script by a liberal washing of blood—an attempt which, unfortunately, is not successful. For "Ramshackle Inn" quite often succeeds in being only sleepy when it means to be hair-raising, and silly when it means to be funny.

The acting customs of Miss Pitts are familiar—the fluttering hands, the daffy expression, the shambling walk as she ambles into and out of trouble. What there is to the play she provides in her role of would-be hotel owner, but in truth she cannot rescue the evening. Her associates include Harlan Briggs as a small town constable, Joe Downing as one of the sinister residents of the inn and Ralph Theadore, Ruth Holden and Mary Barthelmess. Mason Curry deserves a word. He becomes a corpse early in the evening and thereafter is carried about from cellar to closet to trunk, one of the most mobile bodies on record. Arthur Sircom directed and Frederick Fox planned the scenery.

Miss Pitts has made her Broadway debut, but she will have better luck later.

NEW YORK DAILY NEWS
*January 6, 1944*

## ZaSu Pitts Proves a Big Help to a Rickety 'Ramshackle Inn'

By JOHN CHAPMAN

"RAMSHACKLE INN" is a tumble-down play which is fortunate enough to have as its star ZaSu Pitts, the lady with the vacant stare and the mixed-up hands. Miss Pitts, single-handed and empty-headed, cleans up a murderous black market liquor cutting gang.

Everybody knows her, of course, and it is hard to believe that she made her Broadway debut last night at the Royale. She has, in fact, been stage-acting only a year. Now that she has begun she should keep it up, for she is great fun to watch in real life.

Last evening's patrons had a pleasant time hearing her quaver, watching her act with her wrists and discovering that she can, too, do humorous things with her feet. They had, I imagine, a merely mildly exciting time as the plot unfolded like one of Miss Pitts' knee joints.

### New England Again

Ramshackle Inn is a hostelry for moths, termites, bats and shady guests near Gloucester. It's a union rule among playwrights that any comedy melodrama must take place on the New England coast, because then they can make the wind howl, the rainfall and the lights go off and on—and once these things are arranged for the plot is three-quarters finished.

Miss Pitts, a spinster librarian, buys this hotel with her $3,000 savings. She finds it staffed by a sinister handyman and tenanted by mobsters, molls, a kidnapped beauty and two FBI agents—a man and a woman. The FBI man gets taken dead in the first couple of minutes, so that leaves the woman to carry on alone. Every once in a while there is a new corpse, for corpses don't stay fresh very long in modern mystery plays and novels.

### ZaSu Gets Her Man

If it weren't for Miss Pitts the FBI gal wouldn't get far. ZaSu snoops clumsily, questions stupidly, galumphs up and down stairs like nothing human, tries to whistle a signal and can't whistle, bops people with bottles—and pretty soon she has all the crimes solved and all the criminals still living in custody. As a side venture she clears an innocent boy of a crime he did not commit, so the boy can marry a girl.

Joe Downing, as the handyman, is quite sufficiently frightening, and Richard Rober makes a tough accomplice. Harlan Briggs plays a hick constable with uncertainty, and Richard Barthelmess' pretty daughter, Mary, does nicely with the love interest.

When things look worst in the third act Joe Downing ties Miss Pitts' hands behind her around a chair back. "But," she wails, "I'm no good with my hands tied." She's only kidding, because she's amusing even so. I hope somebody writes a better play for her.

# "Over Twenty-One"

Comedy by Ruth Gordon, staging by George S. Kaufman and settings by Raymond Sovey; presented by Max Gordon at the Music Box Theatre, January 3, 1944.

THE NEW YORK SUN
*January 4, 1944*

## 'Over Twenty-One,' by and With Ruth Gordon, an Enormously Funny Show

By WARD MOREHOUSE

THE year of 1944 had its first brush with the drama last night and is off to a successful start. For into 45th street came the year's first play and also Ruth Gordon's—and it's a hit, definitely. In "Over Twenty-One" Miss Gordon has written a gay, glib, daffy and enormously funny show, and the Music Box is back in old form and stride.

"Over Twenty-One," as a play, will not cause earth tremors. The jokes are better than the story. But as entertainment the piece is immense, and it is helped along mightily by the playing of Miss Gordon and her associates and the delightfully inventive direction of George S. Kaufman. The stage business is the funniest I've seen about the show-shops since "You Can't Take It With You" went its way.

Miss Gordon, one of the most artful and guileful actresses of our time, writes of the problems of men in service who are beyond the age of absorption—over 21. Her soldier man is the editor of a liberal paper. He is 29 and is crowding 40. He gets into the war effort via an aviation officers' candidate field in Florida and is assisted in his struggles to make the grade by his famous novelist wife. Well, he wins out, graduating 271 in a class of 253. Off he goes to Arkansas and the wife saves the paper from being sold by taking over the editorship for the duration.

That's the story outline and slight it is, but it's funny all the way. In moments when Ruth Gordon, the playwright, can use a little help, along comes Ruth Gordon, the actress—flip, sly, quick and expert. I've been watching her in all her plays since the mid-twenties and certainly this performance in a part of her own writing is one of her most zestful, one of her finest.

THE CAST

| | |
|---|---|
| Jan Lupton | Beatrice Pearson |
| Roy Lupton | Tom Seidel |
| Paula Wharton | Ruth Gordon |
| Max Wharton | Harvey Stephens |
| Robert Drexel Gow | Loring Smith |
| An Elderly Gent | Eddie Hodge |
| Mrs. Armina Gates | Jessie Busley |
| Col. H. C. Foley | Carroll Ashburn |
| Mrs. Foley | Dennie Moore |
| Joel I. Nixon | Philip Loeb |
| Miss Manley | Kay Aldridge |

No first-play playwright could ask for a better production than that which Max Gordon has given "Over Twenty-One" or more inexhaustible stage direction than Mr. Kaufman has provided. Raymond Sovey's setting, bungalow 26-D, Palmetto Court, Miami, is true to the Florida picture—stucco, tossing palms, bric-a-brac, unpredictable fixtures. And the cast is a good one, indeed.

Harvey Stephens, unaccountably permitted to remain in Hollywood for these several seasons, returns to give an excellent performance as the New York editor who takes to a uniform, age and absorption to the contrary notwithstanding. Beatrice Pearson, an oncoming ingenue, gets the spirit of the play and gets it going briskly in the first act. Loring Smith is a publisher, and is good at it. Jessie Busley gives the gleam of comedy characterization to a small role, as does Dennie Moore. Kay Aldridge is distractingly pretty in a practically wordless part and the ever-recurrent Philip Loeb, as a Hollywood big shot, is rather wonderful.

All in all, a big evening for the Music Box—and for Miss Gordon. With "Over Twenty-One" she has given her own answer to a problem that must confront many actresses: If you can't find a play, then go write one yourself. And a funny one.

Our Miss Gordon, doubling as playwright and actress, won approval from both sides of the proscenium last night, for upon the stage, quite recognizable in a photographic study, was the face of an old and dear friend, Alexander Woollcott, watching the proceedings quizzically. And, I'd say, with vast delight.

NEW YORK WORLD-TELEGRAM
*January 4, 1944*

## Over Twenty-One Skids After Bright First Act

By BURTON RASCOE

RUTHIE'S First Play would be, I think, a more appropriate title than Over Twenty-One, the name of the starring vehicle Miss Gordon has pasted together for herself, which opened last night at the Music Box.

As a vehicle it is a sort of early Sells-Floto circus float, in which the veteran actress and budding playwright is encushioned and enthroned as "Queen Ruth Gordon." The other members of the cast merely walk alongside the conveyance, like heralds and maids of honor, bearing streamers stretching up to the throne. They are no more important than that to Miss Gordon's offering; they are only part of the decorative scheme.

Whether you will like the play or not will depend upon how much you admire Miss Gordon as an actress, not upon her playwriting abilities and how much of her you can stand after the play has gone to pot—which Over Twenty-One does immediately after the funniest, wittiest and most promising first act on Broadway since My Friend Sandy, which also blew up after the first act and folded after a brief run.

For myself, I admire Miss Gordon so much (as an actress, not as a playwright) that I could sit through a much worse play than Over Twenty-One if she were in it. But enough is enough.

### Kaufman Tricks at Work

The farcical first act is as funny as it is only because it is directed by George S. Kaufman, with all those inventive pieces of "business" which Mr. Kaufman manages to get into most plays he directs, and with that genius he has of making highly artificial patter seem witty and up-to-date. Two-thirds of the hearty laughs in that first act are got by Miss Gordon without opening her mouth; they are Kaufman tricks of the player in relation to the set and props and by the expressions on Miss Gordon's face. The other third of the laughs are got by the way Miss Gordon is directed to say lines like these:

"He's such a nice fellow! We should invite him over some time," to guests in her army camp bungalow after her husband (an Air Corps inductee with whom she has not been alone for more than five minutes) has to obey another bugle call and rush out of the house.

"Go right ahead"—to the mother-in-law of a colonel who, upon meeting the famous author, Paula Wharton (Miss Gordon), says, "I feel like pinching myself."

And "Yes, we've been everywhere about it and nobody can do anything," when Miss Gordon answers that her husband is nearly 40.

Such lines seem much funnier the way Miss Gordon says them than they do in print; but her invention expires after the first act and even though she is supposed to be a very witty author who slays people with funny remarks, spontaneously, all the time, such efforts seem very labored through the second and last acts, and not even the "Kaufman touch" can make them seem otherwise.

**Last 2 Acts Droop**

Besides, the play switches from low farce in the first act to serious comedy in the second, involving a middle-aged man's attempts to memorize the abstrusely technical formulas of aerophysics. (The comedy here depends upon readings of actual test questions and answers—which is about as funny as would be a reading aloud of the instruction sheet of an income tax schedule and is saved from utter boredom only by the screaming of Miss Gordon as a wife determined that her husband will pass the tests.)

The third act switches to one of those dreadful things of the theater—a "message" about democracy and "getting to know the furnished room set," a message made to seem very spurious by Miss Gordon's phoning to Justice Felix Frankfurter (calling him by his first name and "darling") and to rich friends in Bar Harbor to tell them her husband passed his exam.

The comedy idea is the same as that of Pillar to Post, which failed recently—about the housing shortage at army camps, plus something about Miss Gordon's becoming the modern Molly Pitcher by taking her husband's post as editor of a liberal newspaper while he fights for the ideals he has preached . . . . The audience last night was exuberantly indulgent of Miss Gordon's first playwrighting effort. The names of the other (negligible) members of the cast are in the cast box.

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**NEW YORK JOURNAL-AMERICAN**
***January 4, 1944***

## *'Over Twenty-One' at the Music Box Has George S. Kaufman Staging*

**By ROBERT GARLAND**

UNABLE to find a play exactly to her liking, Ruth Gordon sat herself down and wrote it. Its title, for no good reason that I can see, is "Over Twenty-one." And, for many a good reason that I can think of, Max Gordon brought both play and playwright last night into the Music Box. For the better part of three acts, Miss Gordon, star, and Miss Gordon, author, had the folks out front in stitches.

Several of these stitches belong, I am sure, to the George S. Kaufman who did the staging. For there are many times in 45th Street when, if you close your eyes, you'll have no trouble imagining you're seated at a card table of a Monday evening listening to Mr. Kaufman playing poker. "Over Twenty-one" is frequently as good as that, really.

Which is to come right out and say that "Over Twenty-one" is downright entertaining. It's light-comedy at its lightest, with no particular plot to speak of. But, owing to what has come to be known as the George S. Kaufman touch, and quite a bit of comic and oft-times cockeyed dialogue, one laugh follows close upon another. Or, at least, one chuckle. Only in the second stanza is there a laughterless letdown.

**Good Clean Fun**

Such plot as there is had to do with a liberal-minded sort of person who, having given up his job as editor of a liberal-minded sort of newspaper, finds himself in the not too liberal-minded Army. His wife is a celebrated novelist, just returned from Hollywood, where she has been working on the screen version of her new best-seller. Not having laid eyes on friend-husband for quite a while, she finds him in uniform and greatly to her wanting.

Once established in a tourist—and extremely tricky—bungalow in Palmetto Court, outside of Miami, Florida, all sorts of comic things begin to happen, from cutie-ridden colonels who come to call to windows that fly open of their own accord, from moronic bigshots from the Western studios to inside electric lights with their switches outside.

I'm not so sure how laughable all this would be without the acting of Ruth Gordon, the author, and the staging of George Kaufman, the director. But I'm here to tell you that it's all good clean fun with them—although, if they don't mind my saying so, that quiz scene at the end of the second act is too long. Even at its best, it isn't as funny as it sets out to be. It could stand both building up and cutting down.

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**Got Something**

Turning from Ruth Gordon, playwright, to Ruth Gordon, player, I have never seen the lady in finer acting fettle than she is in "Over Twenty-One." As the novelist who is married to a soldier, she plays with such apparent casualness and skill that you are again reminded of her Serena Blandish, which, as far as my memory serves, is high up among the best things—best comic things—she has ever done.

Her performance, like the performance of Margaret Sullavan in "The Voice of the Turtle" at the Morosco, is replete with quick, sensitive, amusingly human little touches, spur-of-the-moment actions and reactions which to tell the truth, have taken great thought and considerable rehearsing. All evening, player does well by playwright.

So do the others, who are uniformly on the right side. Harvey Stephens is always in the picture as the old man of thirty-nine whose heart belongs to his newspaper but whose mind belongs, for the time being, to Uncle Sam. Dennie Moore is funny indeed as Mrs. Colonel Foley. Loring Smith is a blustering publisher. And, as the bigshot from Hollywood, Philip Loeb is perfection . . .

But, both as star and author, "Over Twenty-One" belongs to Ruth Gordon. She's got something there, I'm certain!

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**NEW YORK HERALD TRIBUNE**
***January 4, 1944***

## *Miss Gordon's Night*

**By HOWARD BARNES**

RUTH GORDON has composed a gay comedy for herself in "Over Twenty-One." George S. Kaufman has staged it with all his guile and the star herself romps through the leading role with well tempered gusto. As a first try at playwriting it betrays some ragged edges, but it builds into a merry evening at the Music Box. When the lines do not suffice there are bits of antic business to sustain a mood of laughter. When Miss Gordon gets into tight corners in her own part there is an excellent supporting cast to come to her assistance.

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The theme of this Max Gordon production is a topical triumph, combining the universal appeal of an Army camp with the badinage of recognizable celebrities, who make gossip fodder for the columnists. A famous lady writer journeys from Hollywood to Florida to be with her husband, who is training to be an officer. The fellow had been a famous newspaper editor, but decided that even at thirty-nine, he had to be in uniform. His tribulations, at being over twenty-one, form the thread of the plot. Her valiant championing of his decision gives the piece warmth and a wealth of amusing incident.

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Miss Gordon knows the people of whom she writes. She has conceived her characters wittily and at times maliciously. There are times when there is little enough of a play to back them up, but they manage to remain more than tolerably entertaining. The difficulties of housekeeping in Palmetto Court, Miami, last summer; a call by the colonel, his dizzy wife and her dim-wit mother; the efforts of a publisher to get his editor back at work and those of a Hollywood producer to have the writer fix up a script she has just completed, are all neatly jumbled together. The actress-author owes a considerable debt to the knowing Kaufman for not having the whole play a jumble, but she can take a bow herself for her initial comedy.

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It is not surprising to find author giving actress a honey of a role in "Over Twenty-One." As the vague and brilliant author, with a lot of sense beneath her levity, Miss Gordon has the best of the lines and situations. She makes the most of them, playing the part with wry charm and remarkable conviction. Harvey Stephens is in there giving her cues for laughter as the editor turned soldier. Next to Miss Gordon's acting, though, that of Loring Smith, as an explosive publisher, is the chief delight of the performance. Then there are Philip Loeb, as the picture producer; Dennie Moore and Jessie Busley as the women-folk of the colonel and Tom Seidel and Beatrice Pearson in a subsidiary romance. Incidentally Raymond Sovey has designed a perfect horror of a set and Mainbocher has dressed Miss Gordon to kill. "Over Twenty-One" is not all of a piece, but it adds up to considerable fun.

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**NEW YORK DAILY NEWS**
***January 4, 1944***

## *Ruth Gordon Writes Herself a Delicious Comedy, 'Over 21'*

**By JOHN CHAPMAN**

THE Music Box has a habit of success from which it rarely strays, and now everything is lovely again because it has another hit in Ruth Gordon's "Over Twenty-One." It is a delicious comedy of charm and several kinds of laughter—all good.

Miss Gordon is not alone the pixy star of this play, but also its author, and this puts her right up with such notable female wits as Dorothy Parker and Representative C. B. Luce. She has a critical eye and a sharp bite, as do these other two; and she has something one of the others hasn't in her joke department—an elliptical, off-center sense of what's funny that makes you relish all of your chuckles as well as your howls.

Another Gordon—Producer Max—has done right by our Ruth by hiring an engaging supporting cast and getting George S. Kaufman to direct it.

**Officer Candidates and Wives**

"Over Twenty-One" concerns Army Air Forces officer candidates and their wives. Its title comes from somebody having said that a man who is over 21 can't learn anything. Its story is mainly about a man of 39—a former newspaper editor now an officer candidate—who thinks maybe the saying is right; and about his wife, who thinks he's the most wonderful man in the world.

The setting is a bungalow court in Miami, where there's no sink in the kitchenette, where the bedroom light switch is in the living room and the living room switch outdoors; where the only way you can open the casement windows is stamp on the floor and they fly open. To this court comes a succession of privates and their wives to stay just six weeks —the time it takes a private to become a second lieutenant if he passes his exams.

Miss Gordon portrays a successful novelist and screenwriter. Her ex-editor husband is played most admirably by Harvey Stephens. He quit his millionaire publisher and joined up, despite his age, because he thought he'd serve his country best by fighting. This gravels the rich man, who even comes down to Florida with some vague notion of getting his editor back on the job.

The plot is lively enough and tight enough, but it's the K. Gordon trimmings which count. The actress being exquisitely funny all alone on the stage without saying a word for what seems like several minutes, just by sauntering around, starting to brush her teeth in the kitchenette and rinsing with whisky and then bedding down on the living room couch. Or the author being helpful by giving herself and the others amusing things to say.

Or the author, again, working up an embarrassing social gathering including a colonel, the colonel's dumb wife, his mother-in-law, the publisher, the female novelist and the hapless ex-editor private, just so George Kaufman can get the most comedy out of it.

**Well Chosen Cast**

I won't quote any of the gag lines at you, although there are many. Nor any of the whimsical remarks, because only Miss Gordon can give them their proper elusive flavor. Because I hope you'll be seeing the show.

All of the players are deftly chosen. Loring Smith makes a choleric, vindictive but humorous millionaire. Carroll Ashburn, as the colonel, has to play what Miss Gordon thinks of army brass hats, and this is funny. Dennie Moore is in a typical role as his wife.

Beatrice Pearson and Tom Seidel make a likable couple who get the play going, and Phil Loeb, as a movie producer who comes hunting his author, is in the "Once in a Lifetime" tradition. And that still is a good tradition. Kay Aldridge lends her tall beauty to the brief role of Loeb's secretary, and Jessie Busley is the colonel's mother-in-law. Even colonels have 'em.

Before "Over Twenty-One" was produced certain wiseacres hinted that Miss Gordon didn't write the play, really, but that it was actually done by her husband, Lieut. Garson Kanin, one-time George Abbott aide who became a hot shot movie director. I'm willing to bet it isn't so. It's all Miss Gordon. Kanin probably talked problems with her, sure, but his wife has put her own stamp on the work. The stamp says "sterling."

**NEW YORK TIMES**
***January 4, 1944***

## *Ruth Gordon as a Brisk Army Wife in a New Play 'Over Twenty-One,' by Ruth Gordon*

**By LEWIS NICHOLS**

SINCE the playwrights have been notoriously faithless this season, the actresses now are put to creating their own roles. Last evening the Music Box received "Over Twenty-One," by Ruth Gordon, the playwright, who wrote it especially for Ruth Gordon, the actress. To come right out with it, the project has been successful, for while Miss Gordon is perhaps not yet Shakespeare, she knows a funny line when she sets it down, and she plays it accordingly. The Music Box once again provides an entertaining evening for Forty-fifth Street.

"Over Twenty-One" is in the class of wisecrack comedy, which dashes along from joke to pun to situation. After a quiet sort of start, Miss Gordon, the author, begins taking down her hair, scattering the pins about and making a brilliant commotion. Jokes of all sorts, to be delivered rapidly or slowly, never have fazed Miss Gordon, the actress, and she obviously is having a whale of a time with her own show. George S. Kaufman directed, and that fact has not hindered "Over Twenty-One," for it is the kind of a play he can send merrily over calm spots to the rapid dialogue lying beyond. In short, it is O.K.

Since plays have plots—probably only for the critics' sake—Miss Gordon is writing more or less about Army wives. Her leading character, who just might have been suggested by a friend named Dorothy Parker, is living with her husband, an old fellow of almost forty, who is trying to get his wings as an aviation cadet. He had been an editor of a liberal newspaper, and possibly Miss Gordon had someone in mind there, too. He manages to get through, despite the efforts of the newspaper publisher to talk him out of the attempt, and goes off to the Middle West for further training, while she agrees to edit the paper.

Miss Gordon's ways as an actress are well known. She can take a funny line and send it forth softly, or with a scream, or all dressed up in a leer. These lines she has written, she likes, and she is at the top of her form. She moves about the stage gaily, or tenderly, taking whole-hearted part in some of Mr. Kaufman's better and most active door-banging, or, when her husband is discouraged, softly offering encouragement. Having started writing plays for herself, Miss Gordon probably will keep on. That will be all right, too, if she can act in them as she does in this.

Harvey Stephens has the part of the editor turned cadet, making an honest job of it, and Loring Smith is the publisher who, after failing to talk his editor out of the army, ends by joining the army himself. Philip Loeb, who quite often is a movie magnate, is a movie magnet, and very funny during a too brief appearance in the last act. Carroll Ashburn and Dennie Moore are a colonel and his lady, and Beatrice Pearson and Tom Seidel are a cadet, of proper age, and his wife. It is possible that Ruth Gordon is most of the show at "Over Twenty-One," but under the circumstances that is fair enough. And who could ask for anything more?

**NEW YORK NEWSPAPER PM**
***January 4, 1944***

## *Ruth Gordon Is Twice Blessed*

**By LOUIS KRONENBERGER**

RUTH GORDON'S maiden effort at playwriting will convince no one that a new creative force has entered the theater; indeed, it is only by stretching things that *Over Twenty-One* can really be regarded as a play. But for a number of reasons, it adds up to a very entertaining evening. To begin with, though it condescends to very little in the way of plot, it rests on an amusing up-to-the-minute situation. In the second place, though it boasts hardly one sustained comic scene, it is peppered with funny lines. Again, Miss Gordon has written herself a very juicy part, and proceeded to act it out with brilliant verve. Finally, she has had George Kaufman's strong directorial right arm to lean on—as well (one may be allowed to suspect) as his agile right hand to scribble a good gag or two for her.

The heroine of *Over Twenty-One* is a witty and famous writer who spends six weeks in Miami while her 39-year-old husband, a former newspaper editor, sweats through OCS. To add to his troubles, the bullying owner of the paper hangs around trying to lower his morale so that he'll flunk out and come back to work. But in the end Max gets his commission.

Rumor has had it that this little trio were based on Dorothy Parker, Ralph Ingersoll and Marshall Field. Rumor, I should say, was one-third right: the lady, particularly as Miss Gordon plays her, bears a decided resemblance to Miss Parker. But PM can claim no share in the men folk. It's not a question of their being broad caricatures, or anything like that; they're just two completely different kinds of guys.

The point doesn't matter much anyhow, since it's Miss Gordon's evening from start to finish. As a highly sophisticated lady plunked down among naive Army kids and moronic colonel's wives, and trying to buck up her husband as he groans (at the advanced age of 39) over his textbooks, she has a piquant role. She plays it, most of the time, superbly—not only in her delivery and timing of lines that really suggest Miss Parker, but in her manipulation of the "business" with which *Over Twenty-One* is strewn. The characterization comes thoroughly alive, even though it exists pretty much in a vacuum—for the action is made up of anything that comes along, from broad farce to broader satire, from routine stage tricks to fairly desperate devices. Even the dialogue is upsy-downsy; but the funny lines come when they should and Miss Gordon makes every one of them a winner.

Add to this the Kaufman touch, which is highly perceptible throughout, and you have an evening that you may not dare to analyze but nonetheless enjoy. Harvey Stephens and Loring Smith are agreeable as editor and publisher, and there are agreeable performances by Beatrice Pearson, Philip Loeb and others. But Miss Gordon has swiped almost all the best lines for herself. And why not? She is not only a brilliant comedienne, but she is down in the play as a wit.

**NEW YORK POST**
***January 4, 1944***

## *'Over Twenty-One'— Ruth Gordon Writes Ruth Gordon a Play*

**By WILELLA WALDORF**

IF a dearth of good playwrights continues to plague Broadway, actors and actresses may soon have to write their own plays or spend all of their time "resting."

Ruth Gordon, who may be described as dynamic, obviously has no intention of just sitting around waiting for a part to come along. She has written herself a comedy called "Over Twenty-One," produced by Max Gordon (no relation) at the Music Box Theatre last night, and considering that it was apparently dashed off chiefly to get rid of a fund of excess nervous energy, it provides considerable amusement for three frantic acts.

**She's the Editor's Adoring Wife**

"Over Twenty-One" is not a quiet, literary sort of frolic that is gentle in its humors. It is a wild-eyed farce that leaves you with your tongue hanging out. Miss Gordon is dramatizing the horrific efforts of a brilliant young newspaper editor who has joined the Army Air Forces to get through the O. C. S. course in the prescribed six weeks and become a second lieutenant.

The editor is so notable in his own field that his wealthy publisher is in a terrible quandary without his services, but he is old for a soldier—thirty-nine—and the twenty-year-olds are able to stand the strain with more resilience.

Miss Gordon plays the editor's adoring wife, a popular novelist who writes her own screen versions in Hollywood, and their sojourn in Miami where officers are being trained is a time of torture and travail.

## *"Over Twenty-One" continued*

**George Kaufman Turns On Steam Too**

The author obviously doesn't care a hoot how far she goes for laughs, and she almost always gets them. 26-D, Palmetto Court, where the Whartons live, is equipped with a kitchenette that has no water, an ice-box that occasionally explodes, a window that opens only when you stamp on the floor, and lights that have to be turned on and off out-of-doors.

Viewed baldly after the excitement has worn off a bit, "Over Twenty-One" seems not a little childish at times, but while you're there, it's funny. George S. Kaufman, who turns on almost as much steam as director as Miss Gordon does as author, helps out with the madness at all times.

It is Miss Gordon's performance in the part she wrote herself, however, upon which everything centers at the Music Box. One of the most fantastically mannered actresses on the American stage, she has often made this reviewer long to throw vegetables and assorted garden produce in her direction. We have never, to be sure, actually tossed anything, partly because we are far too polite, and partly because we never had any vegetables handy.

**A Fascinating Irritant, Perhaps**

It may very well be that after all these years Miss Gordon's antics are developing the challenging quality of a fascinating irritant. We shall never be able to accept her in a role such as she endeavored to portray last year in Chekhov's "The Three Sisters," but last night in "Over Twenty One," she seemed, on the whole, comic.

Harvey Stephens as the husband, Loring Smith as the millionaire publisher, Dennie Moore as a colonel's wife, Philip Loeb as a Hollywood mogul, Jessie Busley, Carroll Ashburn—all are helpful in the supporting cast.

As an actress, Miss Gordon has her limitations, but as a playwright, she knows how to make her mannerisms pay dividends.

# *A Letter from an Old Subscriber*

Dear Richard: Yours received and contents absorbed. You may be right. The check of an Emeritus against the new theatre season might be interesting. Not by way of riding herd on my younger confreres, but as a sort of friendly and paternal confirmation of their activities and current conclusions.

You can't say it has been a very good season so far, can you? No, you can't. There has been a good deal of talk I've noticed, regarding its boom features. "Anything will sell in wartime," they say. "And practically everything has sold."

Not so, Richard. Check the record and you will discover, I think, that the boom has struck mostly in those spots from whence detonations of satisfaction were already issuing. There have been, roughly, (and roughly is the word) 57 new samples of entertainment added to the play lists since last June 15; and 37 of them have already returned to the storehouses of their fathers. Only three; possibly four, of them do I consider likely candidates for next year's Best Play record.

Most of the new entertainments, I see by the papers, were intended as escapist entertainment. But, have you ever noticed, Richard, that a common trouble with the escapist theatre is that too often you find the exits barred? You just don't escape from anything.

Good or bad by Broadway estimate, you will always find, or at least I have always found, that each season has its compensations. True, there have been but three, maybe four, dramatic entertainments produced since last summer that could have any possible claim to inclusion in a list of the season's ten best. But there has been a considerable amount of good theatre entertainment within reach of healthy pocketbooks the last several months. Much of it was still with us as old man '43 hobbled away.

The history-making "Oklahoma," for example. The impressive Shakespearean novelty, Robeson's Othello. The inspiring Air Force item, "Winged Victory." Such old and new thrill-builders as "Angel Street," "The Two Mrs. Carrolls" and "Tomorrow the World." Such laughter inciters as "Kiss and Tell," "Arsenic and Old Lace," "The Doughgirls," and "Life With Father."

Two of our First Ladies have not done so well. Miss Hayes' "Harriet" and Miss Cornell's "Lovers and Friends" are old-fashioned creations that pull a bit under the arms and across the chest. In them, these two good actresses have some little difficulty breathing easily.

Musically there is the new and gorgeous "Carmen Jones" and the old, and satisfying "Rosalinda." There is rowdy humor for the buyers in "One Touch of Venus" and "Early to Bed." And always the sweet and chaste "Stars on Ice" for the whole family.

I haven't seen the revived "Merry Widow," but Dick Rodgers' "Connecticut Yankee" is as good as new, and perhaps a little better than it was fifteen years ago. Interesting newcomers to help, too—Julie Warren as a pretty little postcard ingenue; Dick Foran, a robustious red-head from the screen; Vera-Ellen, an original bit of dancing femininity.

This bubbling ancient has also been greatly cheered recently by a new explosion of personality in the theatre. Take Margaret Sullavan, Elliott Nugent and Audrey Christie out of "The Voice of the Turtle" and what have you? A polite but entirely innocuous exhibit of the seduction drama stretched miraculously over a trick set, three acts and two hours of playing time to the delight of playgoing crowds.

Margaret is fascinatingly naive. Elliott is enduringly and endearingly honest, and Audrey is just a rough gal with a defiantly individual flair for double sex talk. Between them they provide an evening of personalized charm in the theatre that any other three I can think of right now would have considerable difficulty repeating.

Take "Over 21." Lift Ruth Gordon and Harvey Stephens out of it and what have you? About as thin a stretch of inventive farce comedy as has paraded the stage in years and year. But with the highly individualized Ruth and the rediscovered Stephens playing it (he has been "in pictures" for a long time), and with George Kaufman staging it, you have a Gordon-Kaufman circus that serves the Gordon-Kaufman public delightfully. Here you also come quickly upon an audience handicap. So long as "Over 21" can play to smart Broadway crowds of Gordon-Kaufman fans its continued success is assured. But when it begins searching out the smaller Broadways to the Westward the going is likely to prove discouragingly uncertain.

Take the new "Ramshackle Inn." Without ZaSu Pitts, again, what have you? A shoddy, crudely tricky, carelessly staged scare-melodrama that Miss Pitts has a hard job holding together. Even if Burton Rascoe did like it. "Ramshackle Inn" may have the makings of another "Bat," but the best of the makings are still buried in the script. Arthur Sircom, who has done enough directing to know better, has not brought them out. It is nice to have Miss Pitts on Broadway. She has true and dependable gifts as a comedienne. She is a bit hand-conscious, having been led to believe that by employing her eloquent fins as though they could easily be detached at the wrists she can coax laughter from any sort of scene. But she has a nice sense of fun, too; a natural flair for the ridiculous and a persuasively likable personality. Her comedy style flutters somewhere between that created by the late Edna Oliver, graven-faced and equine-featured, and the more domesticated angularities of a Beulah Bondi.

The actors, as they so often do, are saving the drama at the moment. But I'm hoping for a dramatists' inning before the season's over.

I remain, dear sir, your idling but still theatre-conscious patron,

BURNS MANTLE

The Deanery,
Forest Hills, L. I., N. Y.